

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000218

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02-07-13

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#) [JA](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SA/INS Director visits Jaffna -- discussions with military and Tamils focus on security zone issue

Refs: Colombo 202, and previous

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: SA/INS Director David Good led a Mission team to Jaffna on February 6. The major topic of conversation was the Sri Lankan military's "high security zones." The military stated that there were other pressing needs that need to be addressed before the security zones should be reviewed. Tamil leaders stressed that the zones had displaced large numbers of civilians and that a reduction in their size allowing the resettlement of IDP's would be a major confidence-building measure. Even with the disagreement over the zones, there was a palpable feeling among interlocutors -- GSL and Tamil -- that the peace process was a net positive and needed to continue. END SUMMARY.

Sri Lankan General stands firm

2. (C) Visiting SA/INS Director David Good led a Mission team including Poloff and Pol FSN to Jaffna on February 6. The first stop for the team was the Sri Lanka Army's (SLA) headquarters at Palaly Airbase. SLA commander for the Jaffna Peninsula Major General Fonseka used the discussion to stress the need for the GSL and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to pursue issues other than the "high security zones." (Note: The Sri Lankan military's security zone network covers about 18 percent of Jaffna's land area. The LTTE and other Tamils have been demanding a sharp reduction in the size of the zones. See Reftels for further background.)

3. (C) While admitting that the security zones were large and that he understood the source of Tamil concerns, Fonseka spent a significant amount of time detailing his argument that only a small number of families were actually affected by the security zones in a negative way. He further argued that a very substantial part of returning Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's) could be settled outside of the security zones. In any case, Fonseka asserted, there had been a net population outflow from Jaffna in the past several months, as Tamils left due to concern with the LTTE. (Note: We are not sure the evidence backs up this last statement by Fonseka. According to the latest UNHCR-generated information, over 300,000 IDP's -- mostly Tamils -- have returned to their places of origin in the north and east since the start of the peace process in December 2001.)

4. (C) Another of Fonseka's key points re the security zones was that the LTTE remained a serious threat to GSL armed forces in the Jaffna region. Fonseka pointed to what he characterized as a pattern of LTTE-instigated incidents meant to harass some of the SLA's smaller military outposts in Jaffna. He also asserted that whereas the Sri Lankan military had withdrawn from areas stipulated in the February 2002 ceasefire accord, the LTTE continued to violate terms of the agreement. Given this situation, the GSL had to move cautiously with respect to the security zone issue -- a hasty withdrawal could provide the LTTE a decisive strategic advantage. He also commented that he was working closely with Satish Nambiar, a retired Indian general who was drafting a report on the security zone issue. Fonseka showed little enthusiasm for the report, reiterating that the key objective must be security for GSL armed forces in the region. (Note: The LTTE has underscored that it will reject Nambiar's report if the draft not meet its demands for a sharp reduction in the size of the zones. Nambiar is currently visiting Sri Lanka and his report should be released soon.)

Tamils press Humanitarian Needs

15. (C) While in Jaffna, Director Good also met with a variety of Jaffna's religious and civil leaders. The leaders -- most of whom were Tamil -- focused their concerns on what they considered the humanitarian aspects of the security zones, arguing that they should be reduced in size. They argued that government steps in this key area would constitute a major confidence-building measure. Catholic Bishop of Jaffna Thomas Savundranayagam summarized the basic argument when he stated that the IDP's returning to Jaffna do not want to just have a roof over their head as the military might suggest. Rather, they want to return to their ancestral homes and return to their previous professions of farming or fishing. For this to take place, the IDP's required and hoped for considerable outside assistance. Senior Hindu priest for Jaffna Somasundaram Swamigal added that the continued overwhelming presence of the military throughout the peninsula served to remind Tamil civilians that they remained "under military occupation." He argued that the negative psychological effect that this situation has on Tamil children was immeasurable.

16. (C) P. Vigneswaran, leader of the NGO Council in Jaffna, was even more strident. He stated that the military had to vacate the security zones immediately. He repeatedly stressed that the military is the main impediment to progress toward peace in Jaffna.

Some Convergence of Views

17. (C) Good stressed during each meeting that the issues currently being discussed were issues of peace and not of war, thus there was improvement over just a year ago. Despite their sharp disagreement over the security zone issue, all interlocutors -- military and Tamil -- agreed with that. The ease of travel, the lifting of checkpoints, and -- most importantly -- the end of fighting created a measurable improvement in the quality of life for all involved. Good also asked his interlocutors about their perception of commitment by the GSL and LTTE to the peace process. Everyone believed that Prime Minister Wickremesinghe was committed to making the peace process work. Although Fonseka did not address the issue of the politics in the south, informal conversations with his staff seemed to show the same concern in the military as Jaffna's civilian population for the issue of "cohabitation" between the president and Prime Minister. Where the views diverged was on the role of the LTTE. The military, the Muslim community, and the international aid workers (UNICEF, ICRC, and Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission representatives) all focused on some of the practices of the LTTE that had to end. On the other hand, Tamil civil society leaders (though not religious leaders who did not touch on the matter) either stated that the LTTE was not carrying out acts such as the recruitment of children or excused incidents such as taxes as needed in response to the military.

18. (C) Good emphasized during each meeting the USG's commitment to help where it could. He stated that the highest levels of the USG were interested in Sri Lanka's peace process and that we were committed to help. He stated that the USG will commit to more demining activities and that the Deputy Secretary hoped to attend the upcoming donor's conference in Tokyo (see Reftels). Each interlocutor expressed gratitude for the efforts of the USG and for the visit to Jaffna.

COMMENT

19. (C) During the Jaffna visit, the security zone issue came out loud-and-clear as the issue on most everyone's mind. With the military and most Tamils on different sides of the fence regarding this matter, it is obviously going to be a very complicated and tricky to work out. As he moves forward with his report, General Nambiar is clearly going to have his hands full. On the positive side of the ledger, there was a convergence of opinion among all interlocutors of whatever stripe that the peace process had brought improvements and needed to continue. (Note: The fifth round of GSL-LTTE peace talks is scheduled to take place February 7-8 in Berlin.) END COMMENT.

110. (U) Director Good cleared on this message.

111. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS